

# About *Dialogue* for Recovery



## What is *Dialogue for Recovery*?

*Dialogue for Recovery* is a new program, from the National Mental Health Association (NMHA), aimed at enhancing communication between doctors and patients about

treatment goals, medication side-effects and other quality of life issues affecting the recovery of individuals diagnosed with serious mental illness.

With a *Dialogue for Recovery*, consumers of mental health services and their doctors can find the right combination of medications and community support that will best serve these individuals in their recovery.

## Why is there a need for *Dialogue for Recovery*?

Millions of Americans live with serious mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (2.2 and 2.3 million, respectively). Recent medical advances and improved community support programs offer these individuals a greater opportunity to lead full and productive lives. Still, many patients discontinue their medications, particularly antipsychotic medications, because of unpleasant side-effects. Discontinuing medication is a serious concern, especially for those people with schizophrenia, because it increases a patient's risk of a relapse of illness.

A recent global survey of 331 psychiatrists from the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy found that more than half view medication issues as the most pressing problem they face in helping patients with schizophrenia. Further, an overwhelming majority (89%) recognizes that treatment side-effects are a major factor in a patient's decision to stop taking medication.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, for several reasons, physicians may be unaware of the side-effects that their patients are experiencing. For example, some individuals may be embarrassed to discuss certain side-effects with their physician, such as sexual dysfunction. Additionally, some medication side-effects may mimic the symptoms of the illness itself. To raise awareness of the need for regular communication between patients and doctors about side-effects, the NMHA developed *Dialogue for Recovery*.



## What are the components of the *Dialogue for Recovery* program?

The *Dialogue for Recovery* program utilizes several resources to facilitate communication between patients and their doctors.

An important element of this communication effort is a new, user-friendly tool, called the Antipsychotic Side-effects Checklist, or ASC. ASC is designed to help patients and their doctors easily identify and communicate about medication side-effects by encouraging them to "ASC" the right questions, so they can determine which side-effects are most bothersome and whether the treatment needs to be modified.

ASC was developed by a medical steering committee led by Peter Weiden, M.D., SUNY Health Science Center, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Alexander Miller, M.D., University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, Texas.

Other program components include: a patient brochure and wallet card on how patients can discuss side-effects with their physicians, a physician fact sheet, a family and friends guide, and a video featuring patients building relationships with their physicians and on their road to recovery.

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## How does the ASC tool work?

ASC serves as a "checklist" of common and distressing side-effects that may result from antipsychotic medications. Ideally, patients should complete ASC prior to their visit, and then review their responses with their physician during an appointment.

By engaging in a dialogue around ASC, a patient and his or her provider can determine if an individual taking antipsychotic medications is experiencing certain side-effects. In addition, ASC can help patients and doctors broach sensitive topics, such as a lack of sex drive or irregular menstruation, which may be related to medication.

Based on the extent and pervasiveness of side-effects, a doctor may want to adjust the dosage of an antipsychotic medication, combine treatments, or switch medications altogether.

## How do you obtain the *Dialogue for Recovery* toolkit?

*Dialogue for Recovery* materials are distributed nationwide to mental health consumers and professionals, family members and advocates through NMHA's network of 340 affiliates (MHAs).



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For more information or to obtain additional *Dialogue for Recovery* materials, please contact your local Mental Health Association, or

National Mental Health Association  
1021 Prince Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

800-969-NMHA (6642)  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)



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